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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between positive discipline techniques and classroom transition times in middle-school classrooms. The study sample consisted of four language arts classes with a total of 113 predominantly white eighth-grade students from a northeast Tennessee school system. Data were collected by establishing transition times before and after positive discipline was introduced into the classes. The teacher timed the students as they transitioned from one activity to another before and after positive discipline techniques were practiced. Each of the transition times before and after the treatment was charted in the number of seconds it took for students to begin an activity. The positive discipline included class meetings to allow students to discuss their behavior, set improvement goals, choose positive reinforcement rewards, and make suggestions for improvement. Data were analyzed using a Paired Sample T-Test and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Results indicated a significant difference in transition times before and after positive discipline. Positive discipline lowered transition times. Results suggest that students in middle school classrooms might benefit from positive discipline techniques. (Contains 20 references.) (SM)

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Running head: THE EFFECTS OF POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

The effects of positive discipline techniques as they relate to transition times in the middle school classroom

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between positive discipline techniques as they relate to classroom transitions in the middle school classroom. The sample for the study consisted of four language arts classes with a total of 113 eighth grade students from a school system in Northeast Tennessee. Data were collected by establishing transition times before and after positive discipline was used in the classes. The teacher timed the students when they transitioned from one activity to another before and after positive discipline techniques were practiced. Data were analyzed using a Paired Sample T-Test and Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. Results indicated a significant difference in transition times before and after positive discipline, and a significant negative relationship between the use of positive discipline and the time it takes the students to transition from one task to the next. The findings of the study suggest that students in middle school classrooms would benefit from positive discipline techniques.

Review of the Literature

Parents and teachers have struggled with the concept of child-discipline for thousands of years. Ancient civilizations often used harsh punishments to discipline offspring who were not compliant to adults. The Hebrews of the Old Testament beat their children with a rod (Proverbs 13:24; Proverbs 22:15, King James Version). Some of the first civilizations to live in the Americas implemented extremely severe chastisements on their children. For example, the Aztec Indians would hold an unruly child's face over a fire burning with hot peppers (Wood, 1992). Caning of schoolgirls was prevalent in the early 1900s, and before the 1960s, girls were paddled regularly in school up to the age of 18 (Stone, 1999). A 1995 survey revealed that 97% of English mothers used corporal punishment (Stone, 1999). However, ideals changed about corporal punishment in the United States. The number of students who were spanked in America's public school dropped from 1,415,540 in 1980 to 470,683 in 1994 (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

The tone of punishment for many years has been to make a child feel bad so that she would behave. Parents and teachers wanted children who misbehaved to feel unfavorable; however, a child who felt good would not misbehave (Nelson, 1996). Using punishment to make a child feel bad was a counteractive approach to encouraging positive behavior. In the video series, *Discipline with Dignity*, Curwin and Mendler (1991) suggested that the traditional methods of discipline did not work with children.

The film showed a classroom from the fifties as the narrator spoke about the schools of the past. In preceding years, students respected teachers and rarely challenged authority figures; however, our world has changed. Children of the 90s were shaped by family breakups, domestic and street violence, parents who were drug addicts and alcoholics, violent computer and video games, and by a fast-paced media. Teachers were working with children who were molded under different circumstances than the previous generations (Curwin & Mendler, 1991).

Classrooms were being filled with a heterogeneous group of children who come from different backgrounds. Students came to school with varying value systems and from different cultures. After the Public Law 94-142 passed in 1976, students with learning and physical disabilities joined the regular education students in the classroom. Students were bringing other influences into the classroom including drug abuse, promiscuous sexual behavior, and a more defiant attitude. Illegal drug use was becoming more widespread among students with 61% of high school seniors having used drugs. More than one million teens became pregnant each year. Hence, the teachers of the 90s were responsible for teaching academic skills and life skills (Borich, 1993). Therefore, the job of teaching became more difficult with a declined value system. In the past, society supported the teacher, and parents stressed the importance of education. Prior to this time in America, teachers and parents had similar expectations for students. Students sat quietly in their desks and raised their hands if they wanted to speak (Curwin & Mendler, 1991).

As the teacher's authority weakened, educators looked for other ways to manage classrooms. If traditional methods were the solution, then students would be conforming to the punishment plans implemented in schools. In the past, punishment plans included scolding, sending the student to the principal's office, demanding a public apology, writing the student's name on the board, and corporal punishment. All of these were an attack on the child or the teacher's self-respect (National Educational Service, 1991). Discipline varied greatly from classroom to classroom, and often students did not know what was expected (Curwin & Mendler, 1988).

In the authoritarian classroom, teachers continued to line desks in rows and expected students to be quiet unless they were called on to speak. Conversely, in the permissive classroom teachers had little control. In a permissive environment students were not given limits and were permitted to behave inappropriately without consequences. In that atmosphere, teachers could not teach and children were not learning self discipline or the subject matter (Nelson, 1988).

Neither the authoritarian formula nor the permissive methods worked to develop capable students. Even more disagreeable were the teachers who alternated between the two methods. Students needed to understand the behavioral expectations of the classroom, and consistency in boundaries and consequences was imperative for classroom management. Permissive and authoritarian methods humiliated students and teachers. It was the responsibility of teachers and administrators to assist every child in developing academically, socially, and emotionally. This was more challenging,

but it was also more essential if a healthier society in America was to be created (Curwin & Mendler, 1988).

In order to meet the needs of students, teachers were encouraged to change the former methods of discipline. The new method that some educators suggested had been given several labels including positive discipline, assertive discipline, and discipline with dignity. All of the proponents of this method argued that children must feel better about themselves in order to behave appropriately (Nelson, 1996). Permissive methods humiliated the teachers. Punishment humiliated or shamed children into obedience. Neither was a long-term solution to achieving the overall goal of developing responsible, self-disciplined students (Mendler & Curwin, 1994).

Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs (1963), the pioneers of positive discipline, wrote a book in 1963 called Encouraging Children to Learn which advised educators to establish a sense of belonging in children. It also suggested that students be involved in the effort to solve behavioral problems. The book also related the need to encourage children to do what was right as opposed to discouraging them to do what was wrong. A child had to first develop a willingness to help the class improve, if he was to make a contribution to the group (Dinkmeyer and Dreikurs, 1963).

A basic need for all the children was the need to belong. Children who did not have a sense of belonging misbehaved in order to obtain attention. The teacher's duty was to make every student feel a part of the group. After the children sensed that they belonged to a community, they participated in an effort to solve problems which arose within the group. Appropriate discipline techniques resulted in long-term change as it

connected students to the group. The disconnected child misbehaved. Class meetings empowered the students to make choices that would directly relate to their group. In class meetings, students assisted in setting the rules and the consequences for breaking the rules. Groups worked toward solving common tasks and the teacher was responsible in assisting in the development of all children. The sense of belonging was only established through caring and encouragement (Dinkmeyer & Dreikurs, 1963).

Nelson (1996) suggested weekly meetings in the middle school setting. This was the first step when working on problems within the group. The meetings were democratic with the majority making the decisions. Class meetings established social interests, cooperation, responsibility, problem solving, consequences, positive attitudes, self-discipline and respect for the students and the teacher (Nelson, 1988). The meetings empowered students to make choices for the community. Cooperative-driven classrooms promoted intrinsic rewards in children. The old authoritarian methods did not produce compliance, but they did retard learning (Joyce & Weil, 1996). In group meetings, the teacher and students made the rules which put them on the same team. If the teacher made all of the rules for the students to follow, then the students and the teacher were on opposite sides which resulted in power struggles. The teacher and students would work toward the same goal if they formulated those goals together (Curwin & Mendler, 1991). If classrooms acted as a social unit, then the teacher and students would have a common value system (Borich, 1993).

In class meetings, students were involved in the effort to solve behavioral problems. As students were empowered to voice their concerns, teachers learned how

they contributed to the behavioral problems in the classroom. Involving students sent the message that students' thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and opinions were important to developing an environment conducive to learning. Students who were involved in developing the learning environment were given choices and opportunities to make decisions that affected them. The rules that emerged from class meetings were developed from the principles of the individuals who followed the rules. Children frequently asked "Why" when they were told to obey a rule. Middle school children called a rule "stupid" if they were caught breaking the rule. Regulations were important in maintaining order, and student-created rules established a greater level of cooperation (Isbell, 1999).

Connecting students to the efforts of classroom management caused a shift in the behavioral paradigm so that everyone in the class was working together. Teachers were not looking for someone to blame, but the class was active in finding solutions. Students were not forced to behave in a particular manner; they chose to behave that way. Students tended to act responsibly when asked to make important decisions. In the positive discipline environment, students exercised control as opposed to being controlled. In the classroom community, students established the goals and the consequences. As a result, they accepted the outcomes, either positive or negative. Class meetings initiated student decision-making, problem-solving, and shared responsibility. During these discussions students created rewards, evaluated class progress, planed activities, discussed ways to support the community, discussed ways

that the teacher could improve, and brainstormed ways the community could work together to improve (Panico, 1997).

Classroom meetings helped students establish a sense of belonging while including them in problem solving within the group. Nonetheless, if a teacher was to establish effective classroom meetings, she had to first encourage the student to behave appropriately. Encouragement developed trust between the teacher and the student. The democratic classroom was governed by consideration of others' rights and mutual respect. Mutual respect meant that the teacher treated students with respect, students treated the teacher with respect, and students treated other students with respect. Every class member understood that each member of the group had something valuable to offer the team. Members of the democratic classroom had self-respect. For the teacher to possess self-respect, he had to be firm, but kind, when speaking with children about rules that had been broken (Dreikurs, Grunwald & Pepper, 1971). Students of the class were not made to feel bad for breaking the rules, and they accepted the natural/logical consequences for the infractions. The consequences were decided upon by the group (Nelson, 1996).

In order to motivate students to engage in appropriate behavior, Mendler and Curwin (1994) suggested that students needed to know that their efforts and actions have value. Also, students needed to feel that they were special and loved. Similarly, students needed to feel that they could influence the people and events around them.

From this perspective, teachers recognized the need for active classrooms and need for transitions in order to provide active learning situations. They understood that transitions that were not properly managed were opportunities for classroom disorder. The first step in managing transitions was to monitor behavior during this time. Canter and Canter (1993) suggested that the teacher spend time at the beginning of the year teaching students the directions to follow during transitions. Students would know what was expected when making a transition, and the teacher would remain consistent in her expectations. Teachers would monitor students during transitions and gently redirect the class to the next task (Canter & Canter,1993). Time lost during transitions was time lost for instruction, and research indicated that there was a direct relationship between student achievement and time spent learning. Teachers who spent less time during transitions had more instructional time in the classroom. Hence, to have a dynamic classroom with multiple transitions, time between transitions had to be minimized (Montague & Knirk, 1999).

Zimmerman (1998), suggested that merely extending the school day would not equate in more time spent in learning. In 1980, 37 states considered extending the school year, but then backed down. Zimmerman differentiated allocated time, engaged time, and learning time in the article, "Improving student achievement by extending school: Is it just a matter of time?" Allocated time was the total number of hours students spent in school. Engaged time was the time students spent participating in learning activities, or instructional time. Instructional time, however, was often interrupted by disciplinary problems and other things disassociated with instruction.

Academic learning time was when learning occurred. Zimmerman (1998) indicated that student achievement was not obtained from allocated time or engaged time. Academic learning time alone yielded student achievement. Furthermore, inefficient classroom management eroded learning time. Poor classroom management and inefficient time management skills among teachers needed to be improved to increase academic learning time (Zimmerman, 1998).

In summary, positive discipline techniques have been used to improve transition times in dynamic classrooms. In addition to classroom meetings, researchers suggested that the public posting of student success when students improved transition times has been an effective method to smoother transitions (Dawson-Rodriques et al., 1997). Classrooms that encouraged students to behave appropriately, had frequent transitions to meet the needs of all learners, students were empowered to establish their goals, rewards and consequences of the classroom community. This practice resulted in a classroom learning environment with fewer discipline problems (Nelson, 1996).

Methodology and Procedures

The population for this study was a middle school with 859 students in Northeast Tennessee. It was comprised of 86.% white students; 11.2% African American students; 1.4% Asian students; .7% Hispanic students; and .1% Native American students. Additionally, 43% of the students received free and reduced lunch. Fifty-two percent of the students lived with both parents; 41% lived with one parent or one parent and a stepparent; and 7% lived with grandparents or a guardian. There were 59 gifted students and 143 students who received other special education services. Furthermore, 73% of the students had a computer in the home; 75% had a cellular telephone; and 63% received a newspaper in the home. The school housed sixth, seventh, and eighth graders.

The sample for the study consisted of four language arts classrooms with a total of 113 eighth-grade students. Of these students, 100 were Caucasian and 13 were African American. Fourteen of the students were learning disabled and 11 were gifted.

Each class contained students who were randomly selected for a team. The first class had 29 students; the second had 28 students; the third class had 26 students; and the fourth class had 30 students.

The data were collected by establishing a baseline of student transition times and then collecting data after the treatment was introduced. The teacher timed the students when they transitioned from one activity to another before positive discipline was introduced to the students. Then the researcher implemented the positive discipline techniques while continuing to monitor transition times. Each of the transition

times before and after the treatment was charted in the number of seconds it took for students to begin an activity.

Procedures

The procedures that were followed in this study included speaking with the principal of the school to obtain her permission to conduct the study. Permission was obtained to collect the data.

Before treatment was introduced, the teacher timed the students as they were asked to make a transition in the classroom from one activity to the next. The first transition involved students entering the room and beginning work on an activity that was displayed on the overhead. Tasks varied, but as the students were transitioned to a new activity, they were timed to measure how long it took them to begin the next task. The transitions were timed for five days without using positive discipline. During those five days, students were told to do a specified task such as opening their books to page 670. A stopwatch was used to time the students. The teacher began the stop watch as soon as the request to do a task was made. If the request was not followed by students, they were asked again. The teacher would continue asking the students to follow the request until all of the students had transitioned to the requested activity. When all of the students were doing the requested task, then the teacher would stop the stopwatch. The teacher wrote the transition times on a sheet of paper without informing the students of their time while the baseline data was being collected.

Then a positive discipline plan was introduced to the classes along with poster-sized charts to help students monitor their progress. The positive discipline techniques

were a modification of a positive discipline plan in the book, Positive Discipline (Nelson, 1996). Positive discipline techniques in this study included class meetings to allow students to discuss their behavior, to set goals for improvement, to choose positive reinforcement rewards, and to make suggestions for improvement. Transition times continued to be monitored for four weeks while the teacher implemented positive discipline techniques.

During the first class meeting, students were given a menu of rewards from which to choose, and they were asked to suggest ways that would help them meet their goals. Students felt that they could meet their goal best if they were given a reward. Students chose a reward that was given whenever they met their goals for five days. Students were allowed to choose from the list or to create a reward that would be more meaningful to them. The menu of rewards included:

1. Listen to the radio during work time – Students choose the station, and the teacher chooses the volume.
2. The teacher will provide students with something to drink during work time.
3. Every student receives a piece of candy.
4. Students have 10 minutes to write notes or a letter to whomever they would like.
5. Students are given 10 minutes to play a word game. (Canter & Association, 1990)

After the baseline data were collected over a five-day period and the students established their goals and rewards, each transition was charted on the poster-sized

charts every time a transition was timed. Students were frequently reminded of their goal when the stopwatch began. Then the teacher would announce the amount of time elapsed as students began to transition. After the stopwatch was stopped, students were told what their transition time was, and one student would write the number of seconds on the posted chart. After the positive discipline plan was introduced to the students, the times were monitored for four weeks. The days were omitted when no transitions were planned. Class meetings were held periodically throughout the time when the transition times were monitored. The charts were then evaluated to determine if there was a relationship in transition times and the use of positive discipline techniques.

Results

Two research questions were used to guide in the analysis of this research. Each research question was followed by a research hypothesis. Research Question 1 was analyzed by using a Paired t-test while Research Question 2 was analyzed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation. All data were analyzed at .05 level of significance.

Research Questions

1. Is there a difference in the time it takes middle school students to move from one task to another in the classroom before and after positive discipline techniques are implemented?
2. Is there a relationship between the use of positive discipline techniques and the time it takes students to transition from one task to the next?

The results of the paired t-test indicated a significant difference (t = 10.29, df =19). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results are displayed in Table 1. Similarly, the results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation indicated a significant relationship (r =-.96, p = .037). Therefore the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1

Paired T-Test For Transition

Transitions	M	SD	df	t-value	2 tailed sig.
Before Positive Discipline	337.6	51.27	3	10.29	.002
After Positive Discipline	41.8	6.4	3		

Discussion

In regard to Research Question #1, is there a significant difference in the time it takes middle school students to move from one task to another in the classroom after positive discipline techniques were implemented, a Paired Sample T-test was conducted. The results indicated a significant difference in the time it takes middle school students to move from one task to another in the classroom after positive discipline techniques were implemented; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Without the use of positive discipline, students used too much time when they made transitions. The researcher desired to have a dynamic classroom and changed tasks up to four times in a 50-minute class period. Before positive discipline, students used transition times to socialize. Some of the students would be disruptive while other

students waited at their seats until the teacher, after several requests, would get all students on task. As a result of implementation of positive discipline, students helped supervise the classroom working to get their peers on task. If a student was disruptive, other students took on leadership roles and would ask the disruptive student to sit down and get to work. After the treatment, most students worked diligently to make quick, smooth transitions. Although there were students who still wanted to be disruptive, other students in the class enforced the student-created rules. The middle schoolers were more moved by peer pressure to meet class goals than they were by teacher coercion.

The findings of this study were consistent with other studies conducted. One of the studies suggested that for greatest success in alleviating the interruptions in the middle school classroom, students should be involved in solving the problems (Albright, Mundo & Panos, 1995). In this study the middle school students in the study reduced classroom transition times. Positive discipline was a means of entrusting students to make responsible decisions and to problem solve. According to research, dynamic classrooms, or classrooms with multiple transitions, are essential in meeting the needs of diverse students (Kovalik & Olsen, 1997). Valuable time, however, can be lost during these transitions. As indicated from the data, positive discipline can decrease the time it takes students to make the essential transitions.

In regard to Research Question #2, is there a relationship between the use of positive discipline techniques and the time it takes students to transition from one task

to the next, a Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was conducted. The results indicated a significant relationship.

There was a high negative correlation between positive discipline techniques and transition times in the classroom. In other words, positive discipline lowered transition times. Without the use of positive discipline, an average of 5.6 minutes were lost during a 50-minute class; this equates to an average of 28 minutes of instruction time lost during a five-day week.

Time was redeemed by using positive discipline in the classrooms. The students were able to make up to four transitions during a 50-minute class in an average time of only 41 seconds per class period. Students were more willing to decrease their transitions because they were empowered to make choices to improve their classroom environment. The middle school students enjoyed being given the responsibility of reducing the time. They realized that the transitions were a problem and came up with ways to solve the problem. The techniques used included class meetings where students discussed concerns and successes in the classroom. During class meetings, students discussed their behavior, set goals for improvement, chose positive reinforcement rewards, and made suggestions for improvement. It was the students who decided that a reward would best help them reduce transition times. Then they chose what reward they wanted, monitored their success, and continued to make suggestions for growth. Besides decreasing transition times, this process provided learning opportunities in problem solving, responsibility, and cooperation. During class meetings, students were empowered to make diverse decisions regarding the use of

homework passes, reading logs, and assignments. They discussed what was most beneficial to them in their learning experiences.

Conclusions

The research was conducted to determine if positive discipline could improve transition times in the middle school classroom. The results of the study demonstrated that there was a significant difference in the time it takes middle school students to transition from one task to another if positive discipline was used in the classroom. The results also indicated a significant relationship between positive discipline and transition times.

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